

Community Response to Immigrants in New Destinations
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Introduction

As is true worldwide, immigration tends to increase the ethnic diversity of national populations. With this diversity come a variety of challenges, including the integration of immigrants into the social and economic life of the receiving country. These challenges are often articulated in national immigration policy debates, but the consequences of immigration are most intensely experienced at the local level. Even the best conceived national level policies cannot deal with the diverse needs of communities attempting to better integrate immigrants into local social and economic life (Pfeffer 2008).

The immediate challenges facing U.S. communities wishing to promote immigrant integration may be even greater than previously thought. Recently published work by Putnam (2007) suggests that increasing diversity results in increasing social isolation and the erosion of social capital not only between members of different ethnic groups, but *also* within ethnic groups. Putnam claims that the latter isolation is the result of newly arriving immigrants isolating themselves as part of a protective strategy. Thus, according to Putnam in the short-run the diversification of American society results in the erosion of group capacity to facilitate the integration of co-ethnics. This loss of capacity makes it more difficult for migrants to gain access to work, shelter, education and other

necessities, leaving them vulnerable to a variety of abuses and unable to become productive members of the community.

Putnam's sobering conclusions highlight the need for active efforts on the part of communities to address the needs of immigrants. If increasing diversity results in greater social isolation in the short-run, community organizations need to effectively engage immigrants and integrate them into community life. Such efforts by civic organizations are even more important in the current context of opposition to public support for unauthorized immigrants. We review recent state and local legislation to constrain unauthorized immigration and in this policy context suggest strategic programming to encourage immigrant self-reliance in becoming productive community members.

State and Local Response to Immigration

If border security and other immigration enforcement efforts continue, many unauthorized Mexican immigrants will remain in the U.S. to avoid the uncertainty, danger and costs of crossing the border. This tendency to settle in the U.S. has already been observed for a number of years (Pfeffer 2007; Massey 2005; Massey et al. 2002). Beginning in the 1990s, immigrants were staying in the U.S. for longer periods, bringing family to live with them, and often settling in the U.S. (Parra and Pfeffer 2006; Durand and Massey 2004; Riosmena 2004; Duchon and Murphy 2001). The presence of these new residents presented a variety of challenges to both the immigrants and the communities they live in. Immigrants to new destinations in the U.S. often lack valid immigration documents, speak little English, have little formal education and are poor (Kritz and Gurak 2004; Bean and Stevens 2003; Capps et al. 2003). All of these

characteristics set them apart from established residents and are likely to result in their exclusion from many aspects of community social and economic life. Such exclusion forces them to rely more heavily on assistance provided by their own ethnic community. Such reliance is not unusual, but in new destination areas with a small and relatively new immigrant community these resources are more limited. Under such circumstances, conditions in the host community are more consequential for immigrant integration (Pfeffer and Parra 2008; 2004). But opportunities to satisfy these needs can vary considerably depending on the local context. Localities may differ in the receptivity of the host community and the degree of competition between local residents for housing, employment and other resources.

Concern about unauthorized immigration has been ongoing for several decades. In the 1990s concern was focused on demands unauthorized immigrants placed on public services, and in 1996 federal legislation was enacted to restrict access to certain federally funded public services.¹ For example, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) restricted unauthorized immigrants' access to federally-funded public benefits. Basically unauthorized immigrants were excluded from federally-funded public benefits except Medicaid emergency medical services and short-term in-kind services (e.g. crisis counseling, short-term homeless shelters, soup kitchens, etc.) (Joyce et al. 2001; Loue et al. 2000; CDC/NCHS 1999). But such efforts had little impact on the continued growth of the unauthorized population.

¹ Prior to the enactment of federal legislation during the 1990s, California voters in 1994 passed a referendum, Proposition 187, that was to exclude unauthorized immigrants and their children from access to a variety of benefits for health care, education and welfare, but almost none of its provisions took effect (Wroe 2008; Spiro 1999).

In response to the continued rapid growth of the unauthorized population in recent decades and the failure of federal policies to effectively regulate such immigration, many state and local governments have in recent years begun to develop their own immigration policies. The National Council of State Legislatures (2008) reports that 46 states last year enacted legislation with provisions related to immigration. In 2007 state legislatures nationwide introduced more than 1,500 immigration-related bills on education, health, access to public benefits, law enforcement, employment and personal identification among other areas (see Figure 1). Of the state immigration-related legislation introduced in 2007, 240 laws were enacted, representing about 15 percent of the legislation introduced. Although a relatively small proportion of this legislation was enacted, the geographic scope of this enacted legislation was broad, covering 46 states. It should also be noted that the enactment of immigration-related legislation by states has increased annually for the past two years (Broder 2007), and recent reports indicate that this trend has continued in 2008.

In addition to state legislation, in recent years localities (i.e. counties, towns and villages) were active in proposing restrictive ordinances regulating relationships between immigrants and others. Some observers claim that local ordinances are often more restrictive than state legislation (Broader 2007). For example a large number of the proposed ordinances we identified attempted to regulate the employment of unauthorized workers or relations between landlords and immigrants without documentation (see Table 1). Many of these ordinances also empowered local police to work with immigration authorities and mandated English as the locality's official language. As indicated in Table 1, a small number of the local ordinances were supportive of immigrants, about

13% of the ordinances identified.² Of the restrictive ordinances identified, we were able to determine that about one-third were voted down, tabled, or challenged in lawsuits.

About one-fifth of the ordinances favoring immigrants were voted down.

Local ordinances were proposed throughout the U.S., but the largest numbers of restrictive ordinances were in the South and Northeast (see Table 2). These ordinances have been proposed by many communities that until recently have not been concerned with immigration. In fact, relatively few local ordinances of this type were proposed prior to 2006. But with the dispersal of immigrants across the American landscape immigration has also become a salient issue outside the immigrant gateway cities in small town America (Lichter and Johnson 2006; Capps et al., 2003; Fix and Passel 2001; Foner 2001; Kraly and Miyares 2001; Duchon and Murphy 2001). In the context of the national debate on immigration policy and the question of unauthorized immigration, many of the local ordinances proposed have made explicit reference to unauthorized immigrants, e.g. sanctions against employers who hire unauthorized workers or landlords who rent to unauthorized immigrants. But the proliferation of local ordinances may or may not accurately reflect the mood of a large proportion of Americans.

² Identification of local immigration-related ordinances nationwide is difficult and we do not claim that our inventory is exhaustive. In March and April 2008, we conducted a web search for information, and attempted to tap diverse sources of information on ordinances enacted since 2006. We began by identifying the U.S. counties registering the most rapidly growth of immigrants according to the 2000 Census of Population and then searched local newspapers in those counties for reports of immigration-related ordinances. Two web sources were most productive identifying newspaper sources: <http://www.dailyearth.com> and the <http://www.library.cornell.edu>. Additional sources for our inventory included the National Council of la Raza (<http://www.nclr.org/>), the Migration Policy Institute (<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/>), the National Immigration Forum (<http://www.immigrationforum.org/>), and the Center for Immigration Studies (<http://www.cis.org/>). We also tapped the data base prepared by the Fair Immigrant Reform Movement (FIRM). Our final list compared favorably with the list prepared by FIRM (www.fairimmigration.org and www.communitychange.org). The FIRM list was last updated July 23, 2007, and we conducted our search more recently (March/April 2008). FIRM identified 161 local ordinances nationwide, compared with our 168. FIRM also identified 128 ordinances as restrictive compared with our 145 and 33 ordinances as favoring immigrants compared with our 23.

New York is an interesting state in which to gauge the opinions of people living outside large centers of immigration like the New York City metropolitan area. Each year Cornell University fields the Empire State Poll and in recent years the poll has included a series of questions about immigration. This statewide poll surveys 1,100 individuals across the state.³ This year the poll included several questions relevant to the questions of local support for immigrants: 1) If immigrants settled in your community, how important is it for the city or township you live in to help immigrants find affordable housing? 2) If immigrants settled in your community, how important is it for the city or township you live in to provide English language training for immigrants? 3) If immigrants without immigration documents, or illegal immigrants, settled in your community, how important is it for the city or township you live in to help these immigrants find affordable housing? 4) If immigrants without immigration documents, or illegal immigrants, settled in your community, how important is it for the city or township you live in to provide English language training for these immigrants? The first two questions were also asked on the 2007 Empire State Poll.

Between 2007 and 2008 there was little change in New Yorkers' opinions about their city or town providing assistance to immigrants in finding affordable housing or learning English (see Figure 3). Almost two-thirds said it was important for localities to provide immigrants with assistance in finding affordable housing. By 2008, 9 out of 10 New Yorkers thought that their city or town should provide English language training for

³ The random sampling frame used within the ESP 2008 allows for the poll results to be generalized to the entire state. Based on the sample size, there is a 95% certainty that survey results are within 3.5 percentage points of the results that would be obtained if all New Yorkers had been interviewed. The poll over-samples the upstate population (i.e. people living in areas above Westchester County) and the rural population (i.e. persons living in Census Tracts with population densities of 500 persons per square mile or less). Data presented for New York State are based on a core sample of 800 New Yorkers, and results are weighted to account for the over-sampling of the upstate population. Additional data for 289 upstate rural persons are presented for comparison, making the total number of upstate rural New Yorkers 456.

immigrants. But when asked about such assistance for unauthorized (or illegal) immigrants, they were more likely to say that the assistance is unimportant. In particular, New Yorkers considered unimportant local assistance to help unauthorized immigrants find affordable housing. Fewer New Yorkers considered it important for their city or town to provide English language training for unauthorized immigrants, but still a majority considered such assistance to be important.

The findings for New York are highly influenced by New York City (NYC) metropolitan area where 37 percent of the population is foreign born and 3 out of 4 persons report that they personally know an immigrant that they are not related to (Empire State Poll 2008; Fiscal Policy Institute 2007). Outside the NYC metropolitan area in Upstate New York only about 5 percent of the population is foreign born, only about half report personally knowing an immigrant and individuals are much less likely to think that their city or town should assist immigrants, although more people think that such assistance is important than think it is unimportant (Empire State Poll 2008; Fiscal Policy Institute 2007). But the majority of people living outside the NYC metropolitan area think that it is unimportant for their city or town to provide affordable housing for *unauthorized* immigrants (see Figure 4), and almost half think that it is unimportant for their city or town to provide English language training to *unauthorized* immigrants (see Figure 5). People living outside the NYC metropolitan area appear to be split about how important it is for their city or town to provide English language training to unauthorized immigrants, that is, similar proportions think such assistance is important and unimportant.

What Should Be Done?

The growth of efforts to implement restrictive local ordinances and the example of New York raises the questions of what can be done. But before addressing this question it is important to ask a more strategic question: What should be done? This question is especially important to ask given the increasing number of migrant families who are settling more permanently in America, as indicated above. Because the largest immigrant group moving to new destination communities is Mexican, we will focus our discussion on Mexicans. They tend to have low levels of educational attainment and low levels of English language proficiency and a relatively high proportion come to the U.S. without immigration documents (Pfeffer and Parra 2008; Kritz and Gurak 2004; Bean and Stevens 2003; Capps et al. 2003).

English language proficiency helps immigrants to be more self-reliant, and this ability is especially important in the context of federal, state and local legislation that limits immigrants', especially unauthorized immigrants, access to public services. English language ability is an especially important issue for Mexican immigrants moving to non-traditional destinations. Because of the recent movement of first-time Mexican immigrants to many of these destinations, a relatively large proportion of the Mexican population is likely to have limited English language ability. In such circumstances, many Mexican immigrants are linguistically and socially isolated and less able to forge linkages with other community members who can help them obtain needed resources. A likely consequence of such social isolation is restricted access to public services, affordable housing, employment opportunities and other resources. For example,

research shows that workers who are Spanish language dominant have lower earned income (Pfeffer and Parra 2008; 2005a; Alba and Nee 2003; White and Kaufmann 1997).

Community efforts to promote language and certain types of technical training can play an important part in furthering the social and economic integration of immigrants into the community. Our research in upstate New York indicates that most immigrants and other community residents lack ongoing interactions with one another. Interactions that do take place not only improve other community residents' understanding of immigrants, they also help immigrants become integrated into the social and economic life of the community in some material ways such as the purchase of a car or home (Pfeffer and Parra 2005).

Immigrants do best in communities where there is a larger concentration of immigrants who speak English well. In this context immigrants have more American friends, are more likely to participate in civic organizations and to be homeowners and they have higher incomes. Our research indicates that the concentration of immigrants who speak English was more important than the proportion of immigrants with immigration documents or the share who have higher levels of education. Specifically, Mexican immigrants living in communities where their co-ethnics are more likely to speak English are more likely to own their own homes and have higher incomes (Parra and Pfeffer 2005; 2005; 2004). The important point here is that immigrants benefit materially from social ties to non-immigrant residents, and English language proficiency is a cornerstone in the formation of such ties.

What Can Be Done?

English language ability is clearly related to immigrant self-reliance and success. But it is difficult for immigrants who come to the U.S. with little English language ability to acquire language skills. Programs that provide English language training can play a critical role in helping immigrants become integrated into the social and economic life of communities. Indeed, the wave of local ordinances proposed in recent years has called for immigrants to speak English. And our assessment of public opinion in New York indicates that there is fairly strong support for local programs providing English language training.

But an estimated 30 percent of all immigrants in the U.S. lack valid immigration authorization, and in recent years Americans in many parts of the U.S. have opposed offering public services to unauthorized immigrants (Pfeffer 2008). As we have shown above, in recent years numerous laws have been proposed at the state and local level to place a variety of restrictions on immigrants. To an extent such legislation reflects the public mood, especially in new immigrant destinations. For example, in upstate and rural areas of New York, a number of which have become new immigrant destinations, public opinion is divided about community support of English language training for unauthorized immigrants.

Nevertheless, there is an increasing tendency for unauthorized immigrant families to settle in new destination communities. Assuming that immigrants are more likely to make positive contributions in these communities if they are self-reliant, then English language training should be made available to them. In the current climate of growing

opposition to public support for unauthorized immigrants, programming provided by nongovernmental civic organizations will be essential.

Many churches already provide such programs, and various schools and colleges offer English as a second language classes. Sometimes workers find it difficult to attend classes because of work-related time constraints and expense. Employers should also play an active role in adjusting work schedules and providing other forms of support (e.g. transportation, tuition, etc.) to facilitate attendance.

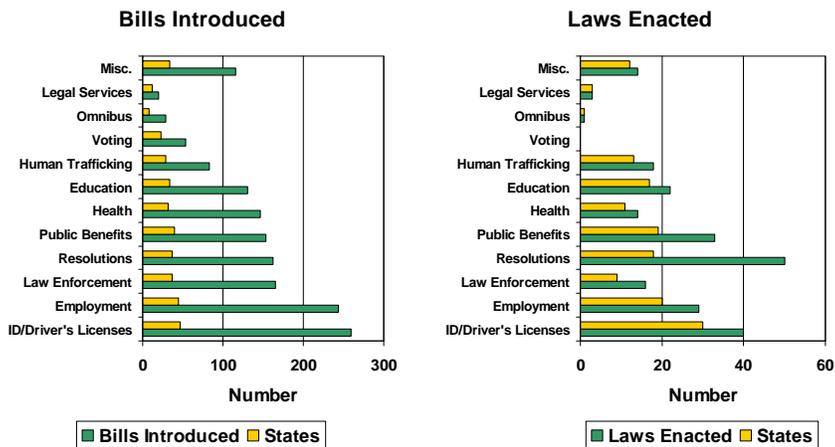
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State Immigration-Related Legislation, 2007



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures 2008

Proposed Ordinances Specifically Regulating Immigrants or Relations with Immigrants Since 2006

Content of Ordinance	Ordinance	
	Restrictive	Supportive
Employer Sanctions	45	--
Sanctions Against Landlords	31	--
English as Official Language	28	--
Police Support Immigration Authorities	25	5
Restrictions on Day Labor	9	--
Other	7	18
Total	145	23

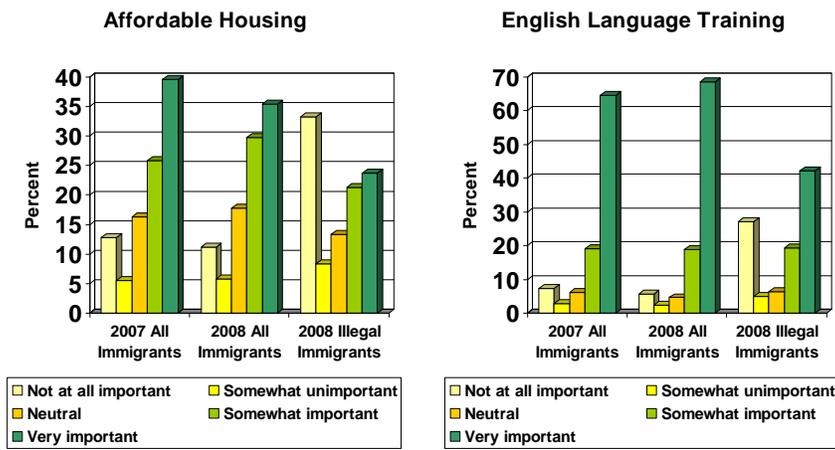
Source: Web Search by Pilar A. Parra and Michelle Leveillee, April 2008

Proposed Ordinances Specifically Regulating Immigrants or Relations with Immigrants Since 2006 by Region

Region	Ordinance	
	Restrictive	Supportive
Northeast	41	3
North Central	21	9
South	56	5
West	27	5
Total	145	22

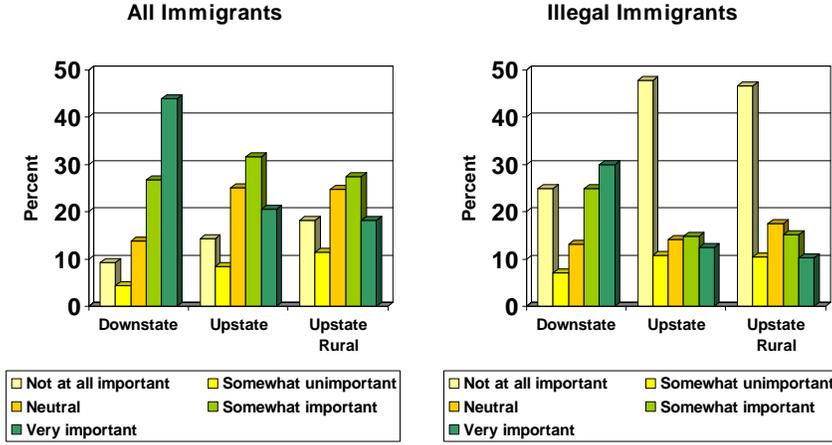
Source: Web Search by Pilar A. Parra and Michelle Leveillee, April 2008

Figure 3. Support of Local Assistance for Immigrants, New York State, 2007 and 2008



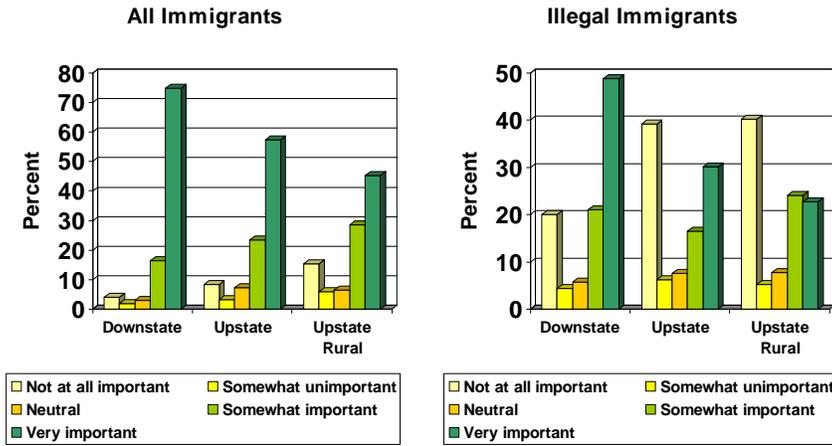
Source: Empire State Poll, Cornell University 2007, 2008

Figure 4. Support for Local Housing Assistance for Immigrants, Downstate, Upstate and Rural New York State, 2008



Source: Empire State Poll, Cornell University 2008

Figure 5. Support for Local English Language Training for Immigrants, Downstate, Upstate and Rural New York State, 2008



Source: Empire State Poll, Cornell University 2008